

Changes in the Mass: Questions and Answers

How do we know what to do at Mass?

What we do at Mass and how we are to do it is presented to us in a book with two parts called the *Roman Missal*. The *Roman Missal* is made up of the *Lectionary for Mass*, the book(s) with all the scripture readings in it, and the *Sacramentary*, the book with both prayers and directions in it. The instructions for celebrating Mass are also found in a document called the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM).

A new *Sacramentary*, in fact the third *Sacramentary* that we have had since the Second Vatican Council, has now been published in Latin by the Holy See (Vatican). The prayers and directions will take some time to be translated into English and go through an extensive approval process. However, a revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) has also been published. The translation of this document into English is expected to take place very shortly. The document itself will be in use in the Diocese of Saint Cloud within a few months.

Is this revised GIRM used by the entire Catholic Church?

Yes, it is in force for dioceses employing the Roman Rite throughout the world. However, it is permissible for a conference of bishops to make adaptations for the dioceses in their conference. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) has done two kinds of adaptations. First there are the new *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds* (approved by the USCCB on June 14, 2001 and confirmed by the Holy See on March 22, 2002). As the title implies, this is a document that discusses the way in which Holy Communion is distributed in the United States. Second, there are certain adaptations called “indults” of the GIRM (approved by the USCCB on November 13, 2001 and confirmed by the Holy See on April 17, 2002). An indult may be thought of as permission that is given to change or modify existing laws.

When will we implement these changes?

The implementation of the provisions of the revised GIRM is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop, whose role is to “foster, govern and watch over the liturgical life in his diocese.” (GIRM #387) The Diocese does not want to make these changes in such a way as to confuse anyone. The plan is to begin to give people information about the changes now and to implement them in Advent. We will inform you of the changes through various bulletin inserts and the Diocese will also print various articles in the diocesan newspaper, *The Saint Cloud Visitor*.



Just how many changes are we talking about?

Quite honestly, it would be hard to guess how many changes will be noticed in each parish. Many changes affect what a particular minister is doing, but may not be all that noticeable to a person in the assembly. Also, there are some practices encouraged in the new GIRM that have actually been taking place for many years in some parishes. For example, the reception of Communion from the cup was a new idea in the 1974 GIRM. Changes in the

text of the revised GIRM reflect over 25 years of pastoral practice. Also, in the revised GIRM, just as in the 1974 edition, certain options are available which will be up to each parish to decide.

One of the changes you will notice is the addition of a gesture of reverence (a bow) when you receive Communion. You may also notice changes about what is carried in procession at the beginning of Mass, when we stand during the preparation of the altar and gifts, what happens during the Lamb of God, and what the extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are doing. As you can see, these changes are quite minor.

Whose idea is it to make these changes?

Ultimately, these changes are happening at the direction of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. Catholics need to remember that the Mass has undergone change for 2000 years. For 1500 years, cities, dioceses and bishops celebrated Mass according to the books that they produced locally. There was some variance between the way Mass was celebrated

from city to city, diocese to diocese and bishop to bishop. At the time of the Council of Trent in the 16th century, a greater effort was made to standardize the Church's celebration of the Mass.

More recently, the Second Vatican Council realized the need for ongoing change by stating that, "where necessary, the rites be revised carefully in light of sound tradition and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times." (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #4) The changes brought about by this Council were major and upsetting to some who did not receive adequate information about the reasons for the changes. Let us remember that while our liturgical practices may change over time, the fundamental beliefs behind the practices do not change. The basic structure of the Mass remains the same: Gathering together (Introductory Rites), proclaiming Sacred Scripture (Liturgy of the Word), Sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ (Liturgy of the Eucharist), and Sending Forth (Concluding Rites). This same structure was followed by Christians in the first centuries of the Church and is followed today.

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Liturgical Catechesis on the Eucharist

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